

IMPRESSMENT OF SEAMEN FROM AMERICAN VESSELS.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING A

REPORT FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

RELATING TO THE

IMPRESSMENT OF SEAMEN

FROM

ON BOARD AMERICAN VESSELS,

SINCE 18TH FEBRUARY 1815.

JANUARY 15, 1827.

Read, and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

WASHINGTON :

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1827.

To the House of Representatives of the United States :

WASHINGTON, 15th January, 1827.

In compliance with a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th of May last, I transmit, herewith, a Report from the Secretary of State, touching the impressment of seamen from on board American vessels, on the high seas or elsewhere, by the commanders of British or other foreign vessels or ships of war, since the 18th of February, 1815, together with such correspondence on the subject as comes within the purview of the resolution.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

The first of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The second of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The third of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down.

The fourth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The fifth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The sixth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down.

The seventh of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The eighth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The ninth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down.

The tenth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The eleventh of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down. The twelfth of the year was a very successful one for the company. The sales were up and the profits were down.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,

January 12, 1827.

The Secretary of State, to whom has been referred by the President, the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th May, 1826, requesting him to cause to be laid before the House "any information in his possession, touching the impressment of Seamen from on board American vessels on the high Seas, or elsewhere, by the Commanders of British or other foreign vessels or ships of War, since the eighteenth of February, eighteen hundred and fifteen, together with any correspondence on the subject with any Foreign Government, so far as the communication of the same be not inconsistent with the public service," has the honor to report :

That, on the 8th day of May last, having then just received at this Department the letter, of which a copy marked A, is herewith reported, a correspondence was opened with Mr. Vaughan, the British Minister, in relation to the instances of alleged impressment which are stated in that letter : That a copy of the notes which passed on that occasion, is herewith also reported, marked B. No further explanation of the circumstances which attended the taking of the two seamen from on board the Brig Pharos, has been yet received at this Department : That it will be seen, from an inspection of the correspondence, that the Captain of that vessel, had sailed from the United States before the Attorney for the District of Massachusetts could obtain his deposition ; and information of his return has not reached this Department. But it is proper to add that Mr. Vaughan has verbally stated that his Government, having received a copy of the note abovementioned, of the 8th of May last, has given the proper orders to procure from Africa all the information necessary to enable it to decide on the conduct of Captain Clavering ; and that he presumes the distance of the place whence it was to be obtained, has hitherto prevented the receipt of instructions, adapted to the state of the case.

No other instances of impressment, falling within the scope of the resolution, are known at this Department, except one which is stated in a recent despatch, from Mr. Raguet, from which an extract is herewith reported, marked C.

All which is respectfully submitted.

H. CLAY.

A.

Consul Samuel Hodges, jun. to the Secretary of State.

CONSULATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

Cape de Verd Islands, Villa du Praya, St. Jago, March 16, 1826.

SIR : I had the honor to inform you, on the 12th of August last, of the outrage committed by Captain D. C. Clevering, Commander of

His Britannic Majesty's ship Redwing, on this station, by firing into the brig Ruby, of Bucksport, and now acquaint you of his impressing two seamen from the brig Pharos, of Boston, on the 6th of December last, while that vessel was at anchor in the harbor of Freetown, Sierra Leone; one of whom, Studson Roberts, of Portland, was given up after a detention of eleven days, by order of Commodore Bullen, who arrived in the mean time, and the other detained under a plea that he was a British subject.

I have the honor to remain, with sentiments of the highest consideration,

Your most obedient humble servant,

SAMUEL HODGES, JUN.

B.

Copy of a letter from Mr. Clay to Mr. Vaughan.

The Right Honorable CHARLES RICHARD VAUGHAN,

Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from Great Britain.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 8th May, 1826.

SIR: I have just received intelligence that Captain D. C. Clavering, Commander of His Britannic Majesty's ship Redwing, on the 6th day of December last, impressed two seamen from on board the American brig Pharos, of Boston, while she was at anchor in the harbor of Freetown, Sierra Leone, on the Coast of Africa; that, after ten days' detention of one of them, he was released; and that the other is still detained in the British service. Although these facts have been communicated through an official channel, the surprise which they justly excite creates an unwillingness to credit them. If, as we are bound, at present, to believe, they are well founded, Captain Clavering must not only have acted without, but contrary to the orders of his Government. For it is, otherwise, impossible to believe that the outrage which they disclose should have been attended with the aggravating circumstance of being perpetrated in a season of profound peace between Great Britain and the rest of Christendom. Assuming, however, the information which we have received, to be correct, the President cannot doubt that the conduct of that officer has been unauthorized, nor that the Government of his Britannic Majesty will promptly animadvert upon it, in such signal manner, as will prevent, by the example, the recurrence of similar enormities in future. If you are without instructions on this subject, I have the honor to request that you will, with as little delay as possible, transmit this note to your Government.

I seize the occasion to tender to you assurances of my high consideration.

H. CLAY.

Mr. Vaughan to Mr. Clay.

WASHINGTON, 10th May, 1826.

SIR : I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your note complaining of the impressment of two American seamen on the Coast of Africa, by Captain Clavering, Commander of His Britannic Majesty's ship *Redwing*. I shall lose no time in transmitting a copy of your note to His Majesty's Government, and I shall anxiously await an explanation of this disagreeable event.

I beg you will accept the assurance of my highest consideration.

CHS. R. VAUGHAN.

The Honorable HENRY CLAY, &c. &c. &c.

Mr. Vaughan to Mr. Clay.

WASHINGTON, 22d May, 1826.

SIR : I have the honor to transmit to you a copy of a letter which I have this day received from Mr. Manners, His Majesty's Consul at Boston, containing certain facts which he has collected from the master of the American ship *Pharos*, relative to the impressment of two sailors from the vessel under his command, off the coast of Africa, by Captain Clavering, of His Majesty's ship *Redwing*.

It appears by the enclosed letters, that Mr. Merchant, the master of the *Pharos*, has distinctly admitted that neither of the men taken on board the *Redwing* were natives of the United States. One of them was an Englishman, whom he had picked up at the Cape de Verd Islands, and the other a native of Norway, and that they had both of them volunteered to serve His Majesty on board the *Redwing*. When the boats of the *Redwing* went alongside of the *Pharos*, an inquiry was made which were the two men who had volunteered to serve His Majesty ; they were pointed out, and told by the person in command of the *Pharos*, at the time, to go into the boat from the *Redwing*, which they did, voluntarily. It being found, afterwards, that the seaman who was a native of Norway had an American protection, he was sent back to the *Pharos*.

When I had the honor to receive your note of the eighth instant, relating to this alleged impressment of two American sailors, I had no doubt but that, in due time, I should receive a satisfactory explanation of the transaction complained of, as I am not aware of any act being now in force, at this period of peace, which justifies the impressment of British seamen by His Majesty's forces.

I invite you, Sir, to institute an investigation into the facts stated in the enclosed letter, and should that investigation satisfactorily prove that the master of the *Pharos* has misled the Government of the United States, by a misrepresentation of the occurrence in question, that he may be punished, in order to deter others from a similar

offence, and that the utmost publicity may be given to the real facts of the case, in order to allay the irritated feelings which have been manifested by the public.

I request, Sir, that you will accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

CHARLES R. VAUGHAN.

The Hon. HENRY CLAY, &c. &c. &c.

Mr. Manners, His Majesty's Consul at Boston, to Mr. Vaughan.

HIS MAJESTY'S CONSULATE, BOSTON, May 13, 1826.

SIR: The master of the American brig *Pharos*, recently arrived at this port from Africa, having published a statement in which he accused Captain Clavering, of His Majesty's ship *Redwing*, of having forcibly taken from on board his brig two seamen; and the circumstance having excited some sensation, I felt it my duty to ascertain the real state of the case, and, with this view, called, in company with a friend, on the author of the accusation, Captain Merchant. As the affair may, probably, be misrepresented to you, I have the honor to communicate the result of the interview. After much evasion and evident embarrassment, at being called upon to explain, Captain Merchant distinctly admitted that neither of the men taken on board the *Redwing* were native Americans; that one of them was an Englishman whom he had picked up at the Cape de Verd Islands; that they had both *volunteered* to serve His Majesty on board the *Redwing*; that when the boat from the *Redwing* came alongside the *Pharos*, Sailingmaster Taylor, who commanded her, inquired which were the men who had so volunteered to serve His Majesty; that they were pointed out, when they were told to go into the boat, which they did, voluntarily; that no opposition whatever was made to their leaving the *Pharos*, by the mate, who commanded, Captain Merchant being absent, on shore; and that one of the the men, a native of Norway, having an American protection, was, subsequently, sent back to the *Pharos*. I am happy in having thus detected a falsehood, calculated to injure the character of a gallant British officer, and trust that you will not consider this communication either unnecessary or intrusive.

I have the honor, &c.

GEORGE MANNERS.

The Right Hon. C. R. VAUGHAN, &c. &c. &c.

Mr. Clay to Mr. Vaughan.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 15th June, 1826.

SIR: As soon as I recovered from an indisposition which confined me at the receipt of your note of the 22d ultimo, transmitting a state-

ment by the British Consul at Boston, of the circumstances attending the impressment of two seamen from on board the American brig *Pharos*, represented by him to have been obtained from the commander, Captain Merchant, I addressed a letter to the United States' Attorney for the District of Massachusetts, requesting him to exhibit the statement to the Captain, in order to ascertain if it were a full and fair account of the transaction, and, if necessary, to take his deposition. I regret to have to inform you, that it appears from a letter just received from Mr. Blake, the Attorney, that, on or about the 15th ultimo, only two days after the date of the Consul's letter, Captain Merchant had sailed from Boston, on a voyage to the Cape de Verd Islands. We shall not be discouraged, by this disappointment, from a further prosecution of the investigation; and it will afford much satisfaction, if it should issue in an acquittal of the British officers concerned, of all blame. In the mean time, it is necessary to make some observations on the statement which the British Consul has forwarded. And the first is, that if he felt himself officially authorized to interrogate Captain Merchant on the occasion, it would have been better to have called in a magistrate, qualified to administer an oath, and to take the examination of the witness. A deposition taken under that solemnity, by a qualified and responsible officer, would have enabled us to judge how far the imputation to the witness of evasion and embarrassment which the Consul permits himself to make, was well founded. It would, probably, have been also, more full and explicit than the Consul's statement, on two or three important particulars. For example; it would, most likely, have detailed the circumstances under which the two seamen are alleged to have *volunteered* to serve His Britannic Majesty, and, particularly, by *whose* order it was that, when demanded by the boat from the *Redwing*, they left the *Pharos* and went on board the boat. But, passing by the imperfections of this *ex parte* statement, unverified by any oath, and giving to it the fullest credit, it does not furnish any thing like a satisfactory explanation, as you seem to suppose, of the conduct of the British officers.

Certainly, it is not necessary to remark that, if the fact be true that neither of the seamen were natives of the United States, it could constitute no justification of Captain Clavering, unless the British Government is prepared to assert the extraordinary claim that all seamen found on board a foreign vessel, who are not natives of the country to which the vessel belongs, may be taken, or impressed into the British service.

The case, then, appears to be, that two seamen, part of the crew of an American vessel, in a distant foreign port, and where it was difficult, if not impracticable, to supply their places, volunteer to serve on board a British vessel of war; but when, and under what circumstances, they volunteered, does not appear; and that a boat is sent, (most probably with armed men, at any rate, in the presence of an armed force ready to sustain her,) along side the American vessel, and, in the absence of her Captain, the seamen are demanded, and being pointed out, they are told to go into the boat, which they do, voluntarily, and

without any opposition from the Mate, who had been left in the command of the ship. If no actual force were applied in the seizure of the men, the circumstances attending the affair superseded the necessity of its direct use. The demand being made in the absence of the commander of the American vessel, the mate, who represented him, and, probably, had no instructions for such an occurrence, no doubt saw how unavailing any resistance would be, and hence, forbore to make any opposition. The mischief would be manifest, of allowing an armed vessel to obtain seamen from a foreign merchantman, under color of their volunteering. Such a practice would lead to every species of abuse; and if, after seamen are thus suffered to volunteer, or are enticed from their duty, they may be lawfully demanded of the unarmed merchantman in the presence of a man of war, and by a boat, for that purpose sent from her, with a crew armed or unarmed, whatever name may be given to the transaction, it is, in fact, if not in form, an instance of impressment. The actual presence of a competent force, may be sufficient to attain all its purposes without a direct application of it; and the moral and legal responsibility of him who commands it, is as great in the one case as in the other. Should, therefore, the statement of the British Consul turn out to be true in all its particulars, the President indulges the confident expectation that the Government of His Britannic Majesty will not fail to require an immediate restoration of the seaman yet detained in the British service, and cause such punishment to be inflicted on the officers who were concerned in the impressment, as will effectually prevent the recurrence of similar outrages.

I avail myself of the occasion to renew assurances of my distinguished consideration.

H. CLAY.

Right Hon. C. R. VAUGHAN,
Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from G. Britain.

Mr. Vaughan to Mr. Clay.

WASHINGTON, June 22, 1826.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, on the 20th instant, of your note, dated the 15th, containing some observations upon the letter which I communicated to you from His Majesty's Consul at Boston, giving me some information which he had acquired respecting the alleged impressment of two American seamen, by a British Officer, off the Coast of Africa.

I should have willingly abstained from making any further observation upon the subject of this supposed impressment, until the result of the investigation which I invited, upon the report made to me by the British Consul, should have put us in possession of the real facts of the transaction.

As you have concluded, however, your observations upon the Consul's letter, with expressing the confident expectation of the President

that His Majesty's Government will not fail to require the restoration of the seaman who remains on board the British sloop, and to punish the officer concerned in the impressment of him, "though the statement of the British Consul should turn out to be true, in all its particulars;" as I cannot acquiesce in the justness of this demand, some observations seem to be required of me.

Should the circumstances, as stated to me by the Consul, turn out to be correct, surely no outrage can be alleged against the officer of the *Redwing* sloop. Having been informed that two British seamen, aboard the American brig *Pharos*, volunteered to enter on board his ship, he sent a boat to inquire for them, when, without force or menace, excepting such as you are pleased to imply from the vessel of war being in sight, the two seamen leave the *Pharos*, and are conveyed on board the *Redwing*. It was then found that one of them, only, was a British seaman, and he remained on board, while the other, being a native of Norway, with an American protection, was sent back to the American brig. This part of the conduct of the British officer ought to do away all apprehension expressed in one part of your note, that "the British Government may be prepared to assert the extraordinary claim, that all seamen found on board a foreign vessel, who are not natives of the country to which the vessel belongs, may be taken, or impressed into the British service."

I trust that you will do me the justice to believe that I have been induced to protract my correspondence with you, upon the subject of this alleged impressment, with the imperfect information which has hitherto reached me, from an anxious desire, only, to calm the irritation which complaints of such a nature are too apt to excite in the feelings of the public.

Anxious to seize the first opportunity of doing away any misrepresentation which might aggravate those feelings, I was glad to have been enabled to communicate to you the report of the Consul; and I beg leave to express the satisfaction with which I learned from your note of the 15th, that you had already instituted an inquiry into the circumstances of this transaction, and that the investigation would be continued though rendered unfortunately fruitless, at present, on account, of the captain of the American brig having sailed from Boston for the Cape de Verd Islands.

I shall anxiously await the final issue of the inquiries instituted into this transaction; and I cannot but entertain a confident expectation, from what has already transpired, that the British officer concerned will be acquitted of all blame.

I seize this opportunity to renew to you the assurances of my high consideration.

CHARLES R. VAUGHAN.

The Hon. HENRY CLAY,
Secretary of State.

C.

Extract of a letter, No. 17, from Mr. Condé Raguet, Chargé d'Affaires of the United States at Rio de Janeiro, to the Secretary of State, dated Rio de Janeiro, October 31, 1826.

“Mr. Bond* relates three instances of recent impressment of American seamen, and says, ‘I am well convinced that there are others on board the fleet† who have been impressed, but they are prevented from coming ashore. I have understood that those who have been impressed, and who refuse to enter the service, are compelled to do heavier duty than the rest ; are sometimes put on short allowance, and are paid less than the others, in order to induce them to accept of the bounty : in consequence of which, some have entered, after refusing to do so for a long time.’ He states one case of an American being severely beaten by a press-gang, and carried off, after having been released from a former impressment a few days before.”

* Consul of the United States at Monte Video.

† That of Brazil.